

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant:	Stephen Anderson et al.	Examiner:	Unassigned
Serial No.:	10/784,691	Group Art Unit:	2141
Filed:	February 23, 2004	Docket No.:	60001.0392US01/MS300316.1
Title:	Systems and Methods for Managing Discussion Threads Based on Ratings		

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT (37 C.F.R. §1.97(c))

Mail Stop Amendment
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450

Dear Sir:

With regard to the above-identified application, the information contained in this Information Disclosure Statement is hereby brought to the attention of the Examiner for consideration.

This statement should be considered because it is submitted before the mailing date of a first Office Action on-the-merits. Accordingly, no fee is due for consideration of the information contained herein.

At least some of the features disclosed in the patent application identified above (hereinafter "the Application") may have been included in a beta release of Microsoft Office software, which occurred in October 2002. Therefore, it is possible some of the system code incorporating the described implementations was disclosed to a controlled set of users more than one year before the filing date of the Application. This beta release of the Office software, which was conducted for testing purposes, included approximately five thousand users. It is significant to note that the beta release was distributed to a fixed number of users, and each user acknowledged a Microsoft non-disclosure agreement. The non-disclosure agreement included the following clause:

7. CONFIDENTIALITY. The Product, including its existence and features, and related information are proprietary and confidential information to Microsoft and its suppliers. Recipient agrees not to disclose or provide the Product, documentation, or any related information (including the Product features or the results of use or testing) to any third party, prior to commercial release of the Product. However, Recipient may disclose confidential information in accordance with judicial or other governmental order, provided Recipient shall give Microsoft reasonable written notice prior to such disclosure and shall comply with any applicable protective order or equivalent. Further, Recipient shall not be liable to Microsoft for disclosure of information which Recipient can prove (a) is already known to Recipient without an obligation to maintain the same as confidential; (b) becomes publicly known through no wrongful act of Recipient; (c) is rightfully received from a third party without breach of an obligation of confidentiality owed to Microsoft; or (d) is independently developed by Recipient. The obligations of this Section 7 are in addition to the terms of any confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement that may exist between Microsoft and Recipient.

Since the beta release was distributed to a fixed number of users that acknowledged the above confidentiality clause, Applicants believe submission of the claims in the Application is proper.

No representation is made that a reference is "prior art" within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. §§ 102 and 103 and Applicants reserve the right, pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 1.131 or otherwise, to establish that the reference(s) are not "prior art." Moreover, Applicants do not represent that a reference has been thoroughly reviewed or that any relevance of any portion of a reference is intended.

Consideration of the information above is respectfully requested.

Please charge any additional fees or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 13-2725.

Respectfully submitted,
MERCHANT & GOULD P.C.

P.O. Box 2903
Minneapolis, MN 55402-0903
404.954.5066

Date: May 4, 2006

/D. Kent Stier/
D. Kent Stier
Reg. No. 50,640

DKS/tmc

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